



F. Philip Prelli  
Commissioner

# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER



Tel: (860) 713-2500  
Fax: (860) 713-2514

Testimony presented to the Select Committee on Children  
Of the Connecticut General Assembly by  
Connecticut Commissioner of Agriculture  
F. Philip Prelli  
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Good morning Chair Musto, Chair Urban and Members of the Committee.

My name is Phil Prelli and I have the distinct pleasure of serving as Connecticut's Commissioner of Agriculture

I am here today to testify in support of the goals set forth in Raised Bill No. 5041  
AAC CROSS – REPORTING OF CHILD ABUSE AND ANIMAL CRUELTY.

It is difficult to envision anything more disturbing than the abuse of a vulnerable human being, particularly an innocent child. There is no question that everyone, regardless of your station in life, needs to be on guard against such despicable acts. Animal Control Officers, state or municipal, serve in a law enforcement capacity and consequently, right now, have a moral obligation to report any suspicion of child or elder abuse. They would not have it any other way. Our ACO's are dedicated public servants who work to protect both our citizens and our animal population from neglect and abuse. Any responsible human being recognizes that one can never be too careful with the safety of Connecticut's greatest resource – our children.

There is no question that child and elder abuse and animal abuse are clearly related. We have encountered this many times, particularly in animal hoarding situations.

In order to make this proposed legislation as effective as possible I point out some observations in the spirit of improving the bill.

There is no doubt that some signs of abuse, towards humans or animals, is so clear, so blatant, that it cannot be missed by anyone with their eyes open. But there are subtle signs of abuse, warnings, which require a trained eye. And there can never be too many eyes watching.

Our ACO's do not have that crucial training to detect the subtle signs or warnings of child or senior abuse. Nothing would be more disturbing to them as to miss a critical observation that could have prevented a tragedy because they didn't know or couldn't recognize the warning. That is their fear. The ability to act before a heart breaking loss is paramount so it is imperative that this not be taken lightly.

Similarly, and of course not quite at the same level of intensity, workers at the Department of Children and Families do not have training in what constitutes animal abuse. Once again, the obvious signs can be detected and I have no doubt that when that is apparent, action is taken. However there is a tendency to personify animals and view their condition from the context of how the human observer would feel if they were in those circumstances. I'll use the example, and of course you can imagine many more examples, of a horse, or cattle in a field during a normal snowstorm. To a casual and untrained observer, animals with a coating of snow on their fur might appear abused. They may or may not be. In fact it is more likely that they are in a very healthy situation as opposed to being confined in a barn. That can be determined by an experienced officer. There is a concern that an inability to discern between perceived animal abuse or neglect and actual animal abuse or neglect those could lead to a paralyzing amount of reports to the Department of Agriculture. That, in turn could lead to a critical case of animal abuse being mixed in with an apparent case and consequently there could be a delay in acting in time to save the animal.

Unfortunately, a conclusion may be reached that a considerable amount of training must be made available to the Departments when scant resources are available. With roughly 350 Municipal Animal Control Officers added into the mix this proposed legislation may be considered by some to be a mandate upon the municipalities.

I bring forth these concerns, not to place an impediment before the Committee but to assist the Committee in achieving a critical goal.

Thank you for your attention to this most significant matter and the Connecticut Department of Agriculture looks forward to assisting the Committee any way it can.